



Taking Inventory of Your State

Each state is unique, unique in its hand-held cell phone and anti-texting laws, in the level and focus of its public education efforts regarding the laws or the issue of distracted driving, and, if there are even laws on the books, in the level of enforcement of those laws. States are also unique in the public and political will to decrease distracted driving. Therefore, your “Put It Down” campaign must be tailored to address your state’s circumstances.

That means that the first step in framing your state’s goals is to develop a statewide inventory. Only then can you create a strategy that will help eliminate the deadly practice of distracted driving.

The following table provides guidance in developing your state inventory. Because each state is unique, these questions and actions are intended as a starting point in assessing your state.

Public Education

Questions to Ask

- If there is a law on the books, what is the level of public awareness of the state’s law, whether it is a no hand-held cell phone law, anti-texting or both?
- How is the public made aware of the hand-held cell phone and texting ban laws and enforcement efforts in the state?
- Is there any active public education campaign for increased awareness of the dangers of distracted driving?
- What is the public attitude towards strong laws that focus on stopping distracted driving?

What to Look For

- Number and quality of editorial and opinion pieces in newspapers supporting anti hand-held cell phone and texting laws.
- Examples of public intolerance and outrage (e.g., letters-to-the-editor of local newspapers) when reports of a crash reveal that drivers were either talking on a hand-held phone or texting.

- Number, if any, of public service announcements on television, radio, local websites and in newspapers within your state.
- Number and distribution of events targeting distracted driving, such as displays at shopping centers, local festivals and public events, etc.

Actions That Make a Difference

- Use ALL campaign partners to educate the public that distracted drivers are not only a danger to themselves, but everyone else on the road around them.
- Educate the public on the benefits of laws that ban hand-held cell phone use and texting.
- Lead by example: make sure that you put your cell phone down and do not engage in any activity that takes your mind or eyes off the road or hands off the wheel.

Legislation

- What is the political climate in the state? Are public and traffic safety issues being considered in the legislature? In the executive branch of the state's government?
- What types of anti-texting and hand-held cell phone bans have already been passed?
- If your state already has these types of laws, are there any specific weaknesses that could be addressed in new stronger laws?
- What is the political will to pass laws that will either strengthen or enact laws that ban hand-held cell phone use and texting?
- Has the state legislature unsuccessfully considered such laws? What were the circumstances that prevented the bill from becoming law?
- Who were the strong proponents? Opponents? Who are they now?

What to Look For

- Primary, meaning no other offense has to be committed to be pulled over and ticketed, or secondary laws for texting and/or hand-held cell phone violations.
- Laws that apply to both texting and hand-held cell phone use.
- Sufficiently stringent fines or penalty point assessments for non-compliance with anti-texting and hand-held cell phone bans.

Actions That Make a Difference

- Work for passage of laws that make texting and talking on a hand-held cell phone a primary offense.
- Work to make fines for texting and hand-held cell phone violations strong enough to deter violators. Studies for similar laws, like mandatory seat belt use, show that higher fines lead to higher compliance rates.
- Work with your campaign's legislative partners (law enforcement, health care and medical communities, etc.) to inform law makers about the dangers of distracted driving.
- Involve all campaign partners to advocate for passage of primary enforcement laws that ban texting and hand-held cell phone use.

